



**BRADDOCK METRO NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN IMPLEMENTATION
ADVISORY GROUP MEETING #4**
City of Alexandria, Department of Planning and Zoning

September 24, 2012; 7PM
Charles Houston Recreation Center, 901 Wythe Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting notes are recorded by City Staff to provide a written record of principal items of discussion, key comments, decisions of the Advisory Group, and comments from the public. They are not intended to be a verbatim transcription of the meeting.

Meeting Attendees

Braddock Implementation Advisory Group

Sarah Becker
Bill Campbell
Herb Cooper-Levy
Bill Cromley
Glenn Hopkins

Jim Luby
Michelle Saylor
Steve Troxel
Heath Wells
Salena Zellers

Staff

Carrie Beach, PZ
Brandi Collins, PZ
Al Cox, PZ
Laura Durham, RPCA
Faroll Hamer, PZ
Val Hawkins, AEDP

Steve Kaii-Ziegler, PZ
Stephanie Landrum, AEDP
Christina Mindrup, AEDP
Marti Reinfeld, TES
Gwen Wright, PZ

Welcome and Introductions

Faroll Hamer, Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning (PZ), welcomed attendees and noted that several members of the Braddock Implementation Advisory Group (IAG) notified staff that they would be unable to attend. Those members include: Eddie Cettina, Bill Conkey, Heidi Ford, Mariella Posey, and Leslie Zupan. Ms. Hamer discussed the meeting's goals and agenda. She stated that the City is initiating a park planning effort on the Post Office block because of a confluence of two key elements that make the timing right: forthcoming developer contributions and the declining structural condition of the building at 600 N. Henry Street. The property located at 600 N. Henry Street was purchased in 2010 for the community park recommended in the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan. Construction is occurring within the neighborhood on multiple projects and nearing completion on others which means that developer contributions are being provided to the City for the funding of the community park, streetscape improvements, and other amenities in the neighborhood. In addition, continued deterioration of

the 600 N. Henry Street building will either require significant investment in the near future in order to maintain occupancy or partial/full demolition of the building. Park planning and treatment of the building will be discussed by this group at this and future meetings.

Neighborhood Retail Update

Christina Mindrup of Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) provided an update on retail activities in the neighborhood. She began the presentation with background data relevant to potential businesses considering location in the area: population is 5,380, median annual income is \$93,000, and 70% of residents have a Bachelor's Degree. She described three categories of retail: Neighborhood Goods and Services, Food and Beverages, and General Merchandise, Apparel, Furniture and Other (GAFO). National retailers use metrics within those categories to determine optimal locations. Currently, Braddock meets the metrics for the Neighborhood Goods and Services category and will likely meet the metrics within the Food and Beverages category as development projects in the area are completed. The metrics within GAFO may still not be met post-development. However, those businesses are large, destination retailers; not neighborhood-targeted retail.

Among opportunities for new retail siting are the following vacant or for-lease sites: Esmeralda's, Qi, and three commercial bays within the Henry mixed-use development. AEDP distributed a survey to solicit what business meeting attendees want located in the neighborhood. They will use the information in business recruitment efforts for those vacant spaces. Recent new businesses in the neighborhood include Domino's Pizza in the Henry, Caboose coffee shop on Queen Street, and Dos Amigos restaurant in Colecroft.

Christina fielded numerous questions from the audience. Among those responses:

- Residential development has a stronger likelihood of success over office development in the near-term in Braddock based on current absorption rates, the economy, and timing. Braddock's inclusion of a metro station, proximity to the nation's capital, and urban style makes it attractive. More residences will encourage more national retailers to locate in the neighborhood.
- National Harbor was able to attract retailers because free rent was offered to tenants. That model has not yet proven successful. Retail success will be determined when those businesses are required to commence paying rent.
- Eighty percent of Alexandria retailers are independent. That is an identifiable strength for the City and part of its identity.
- National retailers may or may not consider crime rates for the areas they intend to locate as different retailers use different measures to make a siting decision.
- The rationale for three grocery stores in close proximity (Trader Joes, Harris Teeter, and Giant) is that there is an obvious demand for their goods. However, once Harris Teeter is opened for business, it could have an impact on the other two stores.
- The Starbucks store in the Henry can attract other retailers.

- The major challenge in locating a grocery store within the Braddock neighborhood is a lack of suitable space; but a smaller format store might be well-suited to Braddock.
- The Shoppers Food grocery store in Potomac Yards is not expected to close in the near-term.

Funding Update

Steve Kaii-Ziegler, Division Chief for the Department of Planning and Zoning, presented an update on funds (anticipated developer contributions and City Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funds). There are five projects that are currently under construction or approved by City Council to move forward – The Asher, Madison, Braddock Gateway Phase 1, Braddock Metro Place, and Braddock Gateway Phase 2. Currently, the City anticipates approximately \$2.38 million dollars in private developer contributions, although this amount may fluctuate as several of the projects may receive credits towards their contributions for providing either on- or off-site improvements. For example, Braddock Gateway Phase 2 is providing a 1-acre public park as part of its development and will receive a credit, or deduction, in their developer open space contribution.

The City's contributions include the \$2.35 million purchase of 600 N. Henry Street in 2010, an allocated \$100,000 in the CIP during a previous fiscal year for streetscape and park planning, and \$45,000 annually for fiscal years 2013 –2021. Steve stated that the annual \$45,000 allocation could change during that time depending on project funding needs. Finally, rents from the leases at 600 N. Henry total \$117,000 and can be used for park funding.

Community Park Planning

Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator for the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Activities, provided a status report on implementation of a community park on the Post Office/600 N. Henry block. An August 28, 2012 memorandum from City staff to the City Council outlined the progress and challenges with implementing the community park. The City acquired 600 N. Henry in March 2010 and has retained tenants in the building to generate revenue while working to find the appropriate contacts within USPS to discuss potential relocation of USPS carrier operations. The leases at 600 N. Henry are currently month-to-month and the City is currently engaged in productive discussions with the USPS and its broker CBRE. As mentioned, the structures located on 600 N. Henry will soon require capital improvements to keep internal systems running. The property was purchased with Open Space Funds for the purpose of open space – not commercial buildings. Now that developer contributions are being received by the City and the discussions with the US Postal Service are more productive, this is an appropriate time to begin park planning for the site.

The Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan calls for a one-acre park. The entire block is two acres. The City owns approximately half an acre while the US Postal Service owns approximately 1.5 acres. Relocating the Postal Service's on-site carrier operations is a significant economic and logistical challenge. There are four carrier operation facilities within the City. There could be a

coordinated approach to relocating the Braddock carrier operation with the relocation of others within the City. The retail component could remain on-site or in the immediate neighborhood in a new configuration, post-redevelopment. Laura then discussed the tentative park planning schedule and process. There will be both Braddock IAG and larger community meetings. The process will conclude with a City of Alexandria Parks and Recreation Commission public hearing. The IAG's role in the process is to make design related recommendations including park programming, furniture, streetscape, species of trees, historical interpretive markers, etc.

IAG member, Sarah Becker, raised a concern regarding the future displacement of an existing tenant at 600 N. Henry Street, Dennis Whitestone, and requested that the City make itself aware of his interests and respond. Staff responded that the City has met with him, heard his proposal to build one level of parking under the park site to be available for the community and for business people like him to lease spaces. While there are several challenges associated with this idea, such as cost and the impact on park plantings, the City has not made a decision on his proposal as the park planning process is beginning just tonight. The City has committed to giving Mr. Whitestone and the other tenants advance notice of their lease terminations and to provide assistance through AEDP as appropriate.

Prior to a larger discussion about the group's vision for the park, Al Cox, Historic Preservation Manager for the Department of Planning and Zoning, provided background information about the building located at 600 N. Henry Street:

1. Existing building on 600 N. Henry Street

- Was a warehouse constructed in 1930's-40's; it is a Streamline Modern Style architectural style; has aerodynamic horizontal lines, curved glass block
- The entire building is not worth saving as the façade is the only significant architectural feature
- There is no legal requirement to retain the building; although it is a contributing structure in a National Historic District
- The building could be retained in whole or part or architectural elements of the building could be incorporated within any new development
- The building is in need of upgrades and the total cost of the maintenance should be factored into the discussion
- It is not feasible to relocate the building

Laura Durham then facilitated a discussion about Braddock IAG members' vision for the park.

1. Interim park

- There needs to be discussion on the amount of resources that would go towards an interim park
- Would the interim park be removed when new development comes to the site?

- Retaining the building, in whole or part, would impact the ability to construct an interim park on 600 N. Henry Street
2. Phasing
 - If development will not occur in the near-term, is it advantageous or a hindrance to plan the entire 1-acre park?
 - Will the plans hinder potential redevelopment on the remaining 1-acre portion?
 - It is important to not put too much investment in the interim park in case the layout of the site changes
 3. Funding
 - The community needs to know the costs of park options to frame the discussion
 - Any discussion of the preservation or partial-preservation of the building requires a discussion of how that will be funded as it cannot be funded with park funds
 - Demolition of the buildings and structures on 600 N. Henry Street will be funded with park funds
 4. Redevelopment
 - a. What is the “do nothing” alternative?
 - b. The development would occur on the other 1-acre part of the site
 - c. There is no timeline for the redevelopment; there is no developer on board or in negotiations with the US Postal Service
 - d. There would be both residential and retail uses on the site
 5. Programming
 - a. The programming for the park is fairly open, although it cannot be a dog park or athletic field
 - b. Bathrooms are not required for a park of this size

Braddock IAG Feedback on Their Vision for the Park

- Water feature and seasonal skating rink
- Park for events or activities, picnics, meeting place, central community space
- A quiet, peaceful park that has trees and a water feature
- An urban park, similar to Bryant Park in NYC, that featured a small restaurant open to the park
- Interactive water feature for kids
- Use a railroad theme in the park’s design to capture the former railroad ties on Fayette Street
- Ice cream parlor or hot dog restaurant; small easy food; a building would provide a barrier to Route 1
- Vendor Carts
- Exercise Equipment for kids built into the landscape
- Boulders for children to climb

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT FOR THE BRADDOCK IAG:

Provide City staff with graphics and images of community parks that are inspirational or worth replication at the Post Office/600 N. Henry Street block. Send the images in advance and staff will share during the next meeting in late October. In addition, walk around the future park site and visualize the park configuration, building layout, park programming. Come prepared to discuss at the next meeting.

Next Steps

Housekeeping items:

1. There is a vacancy on the Group for the “architect/historic preservation/design expert” slot. The Braddock IAG is invited to provide suggestions for the replacement. At the next meeting, City staff will provide several options for a replacement process and also provide the list of recommendations.
2. The Braddock IAG is invited to provide suggestions for future meeting agenda topics.